



A New Era

We took an exclusive peek at Matilda Motorhomes' brand new B class, the Ford Transit-based Tasman.

Matilda Motorhomes has certainly gone through a few changes in recent times. Among everything else, the company now has a slightly longer name – Matilda Luxury Motorhomes – but that's the minor part.

When Ron Gee Enterprises bought Matilda Motorhomes late last year, the Cairns-based factory was shut down and most of the production facility moved to Melbourne. However, the moulded fibreglass

body, for which Matilda is well known, is actually manufactured in Penguin, Tasmania, and then shipped across Bass Strait.

There's also been some rationalisation in the model line-up. The Isuzu-based units are now the Captain Cook (no change), the Blaxland (formerly the Bradstreet) and the Flinders (formerly the Henry).

The Euro, a Mercedes Benz Sprinter-based motorhome is now the Sturt. The new kid on the block, and the subject of this review,



INSTEAD OF A LARGE BATHROOM, MATILDA OPTED FOR A SMALLER ONE WITH A SEPARATE FIBREGLASS SHOWER AND TOILET

Opposite and above: Matilda's new B class design, the stylish Transit-based Tasman.
Below: Living zone is comfortable for four.

is the Tasman. Based on a Ford Transit cab chassis, the B class 23ft (7m) motorhome is a flat floor design with a double bed in the rear.

ACROSS THE TASMAN

MHG was able to get a look at the new Tasman courtesy of Michael Herbert from Motorhomes Queensland. It was in fact model numero uno and an exclusive viewing for MHG. We should also point out that it is also the prototype that was developed by the previous Matilda Motorhomes owner and a few changes will be made to future models.

The first change has nothing to do with Matilda but concerns the motive power. It's the tried and trusted Ford Transit cab chassis. Our review Ford came with the 2.4L 90kW turbodiesel motor coupled to a five-speed gearbox. However, later models will either have the more powerful 101kW motor and six-speed manual gearbox or the 'Smart Shift' auto with a 92kW motor.

It's not hard to figure out why the Transit is popular choice with motorhome owners

and converters. Although it's a commercial vehicle, it's not a difficult chore to drive and the flat floor design (ie, you can walk through from the cab) makes it ideal for designers and builders. From a driving point of view, features like the split rearview mirrors and centre-of-dash map holder are all a bonus.

From the outside, the Tasman is a very sleek looking motorhome. Matilda has done a good job in grafting the fibreglass body on to the Transit chassis, with the rake of the bonnet, windscreen and front of the motorhome body all neatly lining up.

At the rear, rounded moulding takes away that square look that many motorhomes have. An interesting touch is the aluminium

checkerplate steps that have been added to both the driver and passenger doors and the ladder giving access to the roof.

Although the windows in our review Tasman are Australite hoppers, future models will have the Seitz items with integrated screens and blinds. There're quite a few external lockers but, again, there will be some changes to production models, including making the lockers larger and relocating the gas cylinder compartment (with two 9kg cylinders) to the offside.

CLIMBING ABOARD

Inside the Tasman, Matilda has opted for a layout comprising a front offside dinette, front nearside kitchen, rear offside





bathroom and rear nearside double bed.

Since the Matilda Henry motorhome was first produced, the timber work has always been something to behold and the Tasman has continued with those good looks. Large windows give plenty of natural light and ventilation, assisted by a big Seitz hatch in the rear.

Future models will also have the option of a second hatch above the front area as well. All the windows have curtains and pelmets.



Access to and from the driver's cab is quite easy and in the 'nose cone' above, there's not much except a few useful shelves, part of the sound system and a flatscreen TV.

In the catering department, the kitchen bench has most things needed when camping – Cramer three-burner cooktop, stainless steel sink sans drainer, Smev grill/oven, small slide-out pantry, four drawers (of different sizes), two overhead lockers and a moderate amount of benchtop working area. For easy cleaning, the wall beside the cooktop is brushed stainless laminate.

If the under-bench slide-out pantry is too small, there's no problem because alongside the kitchen bench is a second full-height one – no food storage problems here. On the opposite side of the motorhome, between the dinette and bathroom is the rest of the kitchen features: a Dometic 90L fridge, with a microwave oven mounted above.

Four people can sit quite comfortably at the soft-cushioned dinette. A larger window would be nice here and that will certainly happen in future models. There are three lockers above and the usual under-seat storage, however that will change with both the gas compartment and hot water heater being under the seats in future models. The space taken will be transferred to the under-bed area.

In the rear, the 6ft 4in x 4ft 6in (1.9m x 1.4m) double bed sits on a wooden base and

FROM THE OUTSIDE, THE TASMAN IS A VERY SLEEK LOOKING MOTORHOME

has a foam mattress. Windows on two sides plus the hatch above provide ventilation. General storage is not too bad with two drawers underneath the bed (that area is also accessible from the outside) plus four overhead lockers. Hanging space is provided by a wardrobe at the end of the bed, next to the slide-out pantry.

Instead of having a large bathroom area, Matilda has opted for a smaller one with just a separate moulded fibreglass shower cubicle and Thetford cassette toilet. Venting is provided by both a fan hatch and a small window. I always like the latter – small bathrooms sans window give me a slightly claustrophobic feeling.

Outside the bathroom is a reasonably sized vanity unit with small wash basin, cupboard and mirror on the wall above. Persons exiting the bathroom need to be wary in case anyone is standing at the wash basin.

Eagle-eyed readers might notice that in the technology department there is a roof-mounted Dometic air-conditioner, but

Above left: The Tasman's stylish and easy-clean kitchen. **Left:** Bedroom is fitted in the nearside corner; shower is adjacent.

I liked

- The Matilda's sleek and distinctive lines
- Storage in the kitchen
- Quality timberwork
- Driving the Transit

I would have liked

- More window expanse at the dinette
- More lights (these likely to be fixed in future models)
- Powerpoint near table



Matilda Motorhomes Tasman

BASE VEHICLE:
Ford Transit T430

ENGINE:
2.4L turbodiesel (90kW)

GEARBOX:
Five-speed

MAX POWER:
90kW@4000rpm

MAX TORQUE:
285Nm@2300rpm

BRAKES:
Disc all-round

TARE WEIGHT:
3300kg

GVM:
4250kg

EXTERNAL LENGTH:
23ft (7.0m)

EXTERNAL WIDTH:
7ft 9in (2.36m)

INTERNAL HEIGHT:
6ft 3in (1.9m)

EXTERNAL HEIGHT:
10ft 2in (3.1m) with a/c

COOKTOP:
Cramer three-burner

FRIDGE:
Dometic RM2453 90L

MICROWAVE:
Sharp

GAS:
Two x 9kg

LIGHTING:
12V

HOT WATER:
Gas/electric

FRESH WATER:
160L

GREY WATER:
94L

SECOND STAGE COMPLIANCE:
In progress

PRICE:
\$138,990

only a few 12V downlights in place and no powerpoints. No, this is not a new concept in power design, just a hazard of viewing a prototype – I'm assured that future Tasmans will have powerpoints in suitable places plus lighting for all occasions.

THE BOTTOM LINE

The Matilda Tasman motorhome has been a while in the conception stages and it's good that it has finally materialised.

Until the Benz Sprinter-based Euro/Sturt appeared last year, Matilda Motorhomes really didn't have any Euro truck-based motorhomes in its stable and that was a definite disadvantage compared to what competitors were offering. Now, with both the Sturt and Tasman on the scene, things are looking up.

The Tasman certainly has a layout that will appeal to many buyers, in particular couples

seeking a retirement vehicle. With a length of 23ft and a Ford Transit base vehicle, it's an easy driving motorhome that should give many hours of pleasure on the road.

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Above: Microwave is mounted above the Dometic fridge. **Below left:** The bathroom has a fully moulded fibreglass shower and a Thetford cassette toilet.

